

Minas Gerais and the Brazilian Federation, 1889–1937. By JOHN D. WIRTH. Stanford, 1977. Stanford University Press. Maps. Tables. Graphs. Illustrations. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xx, 322. Cloth. \$17.50.

This is the first of a trilogy dealing with the social and political realities of three of the largest Brazilian states, Minas Gerais, São Paulo (by Joseph L. Love) and Pernambuco (by Robert M. Levine). To these should be added a previous book by Love, *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism, 1882–1930* (Stanford, 1971). They belong to a relatively recent trend by historians and political scientists to look into the main units that make up the Brazilian state. The period covered by the trilogy corresponds to the height of decentralization in the country's independent history, and the period of power concentration that led to the Estado Nôvo in 1937. They deal with the specific features of each state, but at the same time try to get a better understanding of Brazilian history through the interplay of its political regions. A basic underlying question is why, in the long, run, the federation failed, and the meaning of this failure in terms of the country's political, economic and social system.

Wirth's book does a thorough survey of Minas Gerais' geography, economy, society, culture and political history and is very successful in capturing the cultural climates that have made of the *mineiro* a legend in Brazilian politics. The work is rich in original materials and fully covers the pertinent Brazilian and North American literature. The analysis of the political elite is based on a computerized data-base shared by the other authors for their states allowing for interesting and revealing interstate comparisons. Budgetary data, covering the whole period, are also presented for the first time.

While establishing a solid groundwork for the understanding of Minas' peculiarities, Wirth touches several questions that are central for the more general comprehension of Brazil's history. He helps to dispel the myth that the *mineiro* political elite was basically rural, by showing that it was formed at its higher level by a university-trained, urban-based group, which had close ties but was far from being merely representative of agrarian interests. In a period of economic stagnation, the elite increased its political power by becoming specialized in mediation and patronage. Compared with São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul, Minas was weaker and more dependent on resources coming from the central government. This meant, paradoxically, that "Minas had no choice but to play a central role in national affairs" (p. 181). There was, however, a price to be paid.

After 1930, the *mineiros* sided with the Vargas government in his conflict with the *paulistas* and his attempts at decentralization. A new leadership emerged—Benedito Valadares, Gustavo Capanema, and later Juscelino Kubitschek—that increasingly exchanged autonomy and responsiveness to the state's social and economic interests for access to the antechambers of the presidential palace. Their success can be measured by their control of the Social Democratic party after 1945 which dominated Brazilian politics until 1960. Their failure is witnessed by their chronic inability or unwillingness to transform so much political clout into improvements for the state's economy and population, which brought Minas to its unprecedented economic and political marginality in more recent years.

New light is also shed on the role of the Church in *mineiro* and Brazilian politics. The general assumption is that Minas Catholicism is but one more dimension of the state's overall traditionalism. Wirth shows, however, that originally the state's elite was laic and agnostic, very much in line with the secular traditions of Brazil's political leadership. It took a very active Catholic movement to assert the Church's dominance in matters of education, and, for him, "the revival was so successful that Minas did not develop the clerical-secular cleavages of post-Napoleonic Europe, or Mexico and Argentina" (p. 92). But Brazil as a whole did, even if to a lesser degree, and the religious issue was at the very center of the political and intellectual debates in Rio de Janeiro in the thirties and afterward. The religious question has been too neglected in modern Brazilian historiography, and Wirth's book helps to raise the subject by pointing to the proper questions.

Finally, one might wish that the author had explicitly drawn the conclusions and discussed the wider questions that his work helps to establish and raise. He prefers, however, to stay closer to his data, and to let it speak for itself.

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